

Ballard facing rough 'road'

Re-election bid may see challenges

Robert Brum

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Wayne Ballard

Clarkstown highway superintendent

NEW CITY - **Wayne Ballard** has smoothed plenty of rough patches along Clarkstown's 300 miles of town road.

But his re-election bid for a 10th term as highway superintendent may have more potholes than he can handle.

Ballard, this season, has found himself dodging the fallout from patronage accusations and political squabbles that likely cost him the Republican line. He remains on the ballot on the Conservative and Independence party lines.

He got tossed off the GOP line in favor of Frank DiZenzo, a 32-year veteran of Ballard's department. Robert Milone, a field technician in Verizon's Construction Department, is the Democrat in the race.

Ballard dismisses a consultant's report to the town that blamed a deteriorating work environment in his department on preferential treatment given to his political supporters. He said the study was politically motivated and hadn't resulted in any charges or grievances against him.

"The report's charges are baseless," Ballard said. "It was a crime that report even happened."

Then there's the \$100,000 confidential secretary job Ballard handed to Frank Sparaco, whom he had to turn around and fire after the controversial Valley Cottage lawmaker was arrested on election-fraud charges. Ballard said the Town Board unanimously approved the position, and he took appropriate action to dump Sparaco once he was charged.

DiZenzo and Milone aren't buying his explanations.

"We had a lot of patronage going on, favoritism, not getting promoted," said DeZenzo, who contends Ballard wouldn't promote him to foreman or supervisor. "He's hiring guys who are political friends in the department, promoting friends. We just didn't want to see it anymore."

Milone said the report showed the highway department needed an outsider to take charge.

Ballard says he's managed to keep his department's wheels turning despite budget and staff cuts. He said the Town Board won't give him the \$12.8 million it would take to repair all the roads that have been neglected, leaving him just \$2.5 million this year.

"The Town Board has missed an incredible opportunity because oil has never been this low," Ballard said. "Interest rates are extremely favorable, and the town's borrowing rate is incredibly favorable."

But DiZenzo, a motor equipment operator, said Ballard's wish list is way off the mark.

"We couldn't spend that kind of money in a year," he said. "The \$2.5 million is enough. You'd always want more, but in the current state Clarkstown is in now, to bond more money to pave more is not good business."

Milone says he's got more administrative experience than DiZenzo and will bring corporate management training to the department.

"I don't think he has any supervisory experience," Milone said of DiZenzo. "Just because you played baseball for 20 years doesn't make you a manager."

Milone, a former union representative who also has the Working Families line, cited his background as a contractor and in the corporate world.

"They have people who know how to do the work, they need someone who could manage it," said Milone, who unsuccessfully challenged Sparaco for his Legislature seat a few years back.

DiZenzo, whose name also will appear on the Reform party line, says his decades in the highway garage have prepared him to take the keys.

"I've done every job, run every piece of equipment," said DiZenzo. "I've supervised crews. With the help of all the men and women, we'll get the job done."

Ballard insists his opponents can't match his credentials.

"The big issues are qualifications, experience, who can hit the ground running," he said. "Who can continue to provide the services amid tremendous budget cuts."

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